

Reunion Convocation

2010 REUNION: PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

June 5, 2010

It's great to see so many members of the Middlebury family here this weekend.

- More than 1,700 alumni and family members are attending, spanning at least 75 years of Middlebury history.

One of best things about reunions is the incredible stories I hear, especially from the more senior classes, about life at Middlebury prior to my arriving here in 1984. They of course add to my historical knowledge of this great place...but they can also be quite amusing.

As an example: Thursday night, dinner with the 50th Reunion Class:

- Many great stories of that class' experiences here: the role of Dean Ma Kelly; the strict dress codes; mandatory chapel; the social scene -- all of it.
- Quite amusing was listening to Jean Seeler-Gifford give the schedule of events for the next day; it was like a simultaneous translation as the name of buildings have changed sufficiently to require something like this:

"AND AT 11:00, Jay Parini will read in the College Store in Proctor, which means the Old Stu for us" -- (the old Student Union that Proctor replaced in 1960). Then she said, "buses for our class activities will leave from the circle or jug-handle outside Adirondack House, which was Battell House to all of us," and so on.

Or, better still. When the reception at the president's house on Thursday evening was ending, and the class of 1960 was to head to Atwater for dinner, a member of the class asked Jessica and me: "Atwater? You mean we are going to those A-frames for dinner?" "No," I responded. "Those were torn down about 10 years ago. Atwater is a relatively new dining hall behind the Chateau. Just go to the Chateau, turn right, and you can't miss Atwater. "Oh thanks, said the grateful member of the class of 1960. And then she added: "is the Chateau in the same place as it was when we were here?"

Though the physical infrastructure of the College might have changed just a bit over 50 years, or even over the past 15 years for the members of the Class of 1995, the essence of what you experienced here: close friendships, dedicated and caring faculty and staff, and a beautiful environment in which to learn and grow, remains and exerts the same kind of influence on today's students as it did for all of you.

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At Reunion convocation, it's traditional for the president to provide a brief overview of the College today. It would be impossible to convey in the time I have all that our students and faculty have accomplished in the past year, but here are some highlights:

Members of the class of 2010 - another great class - graduated two weeks ago and won:

- A Thomas J. Watson Fellowship
- A Keasbey Scholarship
- A Gates Cambridge Scholarship for science research
- A Fulbright Beginning Professional Journalism Award
- A St. Andrews Scholarship for graduate study in Scotland
- A Compton Mentor Fellowship
- A Weidenfeld Scholarship for study at Oxford

110 seniors participated in the College's fourth annual Student Research Symposium. The symposium was remarkable and helped student presenters develop their public speaking skills.

If theater were a varsity sport, we would have even more than our 32 NCAA national championships! Eight members of the class were selected to take part in this summer's Potomac Theatre Project in New York City. If any of you are in the NYC area this summer, the PTP season runs from July 13 to August 1 at the Atlantic Stage 2 Theater in Chelsea, and I encourage you to try to see our current students perform with equity actors, including Middlebury alumni in New York.

More than half of the class -- that is more than 300 students -- volunteered in town or in Addison County, helping an extraordinary number of Vermonters along the way. One of the great things about coming to Middlebury is the numerous opportunities to do so much in this small state . . . and make a difference. This is a great advantage about coming to Midd for one's undergraduate education, and something I highlight to prospective students who visit the College each April.

A member of the class was among just six students to be honored nationally with the 2009 Brower Youth Award, presented by the Earth Island Institute to young environmental leaders.

Just last week, the men's tennis team won the NCAA division III national championship. Tennis? Ice hockey, OK. Tennis? Actually the second time it has been done in the past 7 years. Quite an accomplishment by Coach Dave Schwarz and his team.

Thirteen members of the class of 2010 earned All-American honors in their respective sports

101 earned all-NESCAC academic honors and 52 all-NESCAC playing honors

The women's cross country team, the men's ice hockey team, and the men's tennis team all won NESCAC (New England Small College Athletic Conference) league championships.

In club sports: both the men's and women's ultimate Frisbee teams -- known as the Pranksters-participated in the national championships for the first time.

As many of you might have read on the College website, a Middlebury team of students won a spot in the Dept of Energy's Solar Decathlon Competition, and in doing so became the first liberal arts college to win such a place in the competition. The decathlon is an international competition in which student teams design and build a solar powered house over an 18-month period. Teams invited through a rigorous competition receive a \$100k grant from DOE. Twenty teams will build their solar houses on the National Mall in DC come October of 2011.

A stunning accomplishment -- the other 19 universities that won entry had graduate schools of engineering and architecture -- but hardly a surprise.

It was, after all, our students who pushed for, proposed, and then helped design our path-breaking biomass gasification plant, and proposed to our board that we become carbon neutral by 2016. The biomass plant is now operating at full capacity, and its woodchips will replace more than 1 million gallons of oil each year and reduce our carbon footprint by 40-45 percent. It has also inspired 11 other colleges and universities to build plants.

Our latest initiative related to environmental leadership and alternative energy use involves biomethane -- using one of Vermont's most readily available and inexpensive resources, cow manure, to produce natural gas that would replace hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil each year. We have signed an agreement with a firm to contract with local farms for their manure and then to transport and convert it into natural gas to use in our boiler plant. If successful, the use of biomethane instead of heating oil will reduce our carbon footprint by another 40 percent, bringing us more than 80 percent of the way toward our goal of carbon neutrality.

From our students' work on the biomass project, to the Solar Decathlon, to a number of other initiatives on campus, those of us who work here get to see daily the power and potential of a liberal arts education, and especially the power of a Middlebury liberal arts education. Just as it was when all of you were here, our students remain the greatest resource of this College. Their intelligence, passion, and creativity give me, and indeed should give all of us, optimism for the future.

And their creativity is on full display at the Old Stone Mill in town, where the College's project on creativity and innovation provides space for students who wish to pursue projects outside the academic program. A student board of six students oversees the space and reviews applications from students who seek space to carry out a creative project in a non-graded environment.

About 30 students are tenants in the Old Stone Mill at any one time, and have been working on projects ranging from beginning on-line literary journals to doing various forms of art work to composing music and giving music lessons to local kids to writing business plans for a new venture to writing scripts for plays to be presented either in the Mill or on campus, plus more.

This project is important, because this generation of students is rather risk averse: it tends to shy away from pursuing things for fear of failure or even getting a "B" grade. This project encourages students to pursue their creative passions outside the academic program, where pressure to succeed is absent, and they can fail or try new things to their benefit.

It is also important because our campus infrastructure is so geared to the academic program that there exist few spaces where students can pursue interests that are not part of an academic program, especially outside of the normal working hours. The significance of this project has just begun to catch on, and the six students who serve on the board that oversees the project, have, not surprisingly, done a great job.

Excellence and talent here, of course, extends to our faculty. Although they continue to see their primary role as teaching and mentoring undergraduate students, our 270 faculty are also active and nationally recognized scholars. Forty faculty members, from 21 academic departments, won 49 grants and fellowships this past year, receiving more than \$4 million in support for their research-the most ever.

The majority of those 40 faculty will have students collaborate on their research projects, and those students working with scientists will have the opportunity to use the most sophisticated instrumentation used today in any scientific laboratory, including nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy or NMRs, and electro-scanning microscopes.

Four faculty, the most ever for Middlebury, won Fulbright Awards, which support international research and teaching. The four will conduct research in Canada, Ukraine, Egypt, and France.

Speaking of faculty, I would like to take a moment to recognize two longtime members of the faculty -- really giants of the faculty -- who are leaving us this year:

- First: John McCardell, who needs no introduction with this group, began his Middlebury career as a history professor in 1976, and went on to serve as president for 13 years. John is hardly retiring; he is leaving us to take on a new challenge, as president of Sewanee: The University of the South, in less than a month. And

- John Elder, a professor of English and Environmental Studies, who came to Middlebury in 1973 and retired this spring as one of the most respected and beloved teachers in Middlebury's long history.

Both Johns will have an endowed professorship bearing their names come next year, and both, I believe, will be with us later this evening for dinner. I hope you get a chance to say hello and thank them for all they have done for the College.

I'm pleased to report that our tradition of innovation and our commitment to fiscal responsibility have enabled us to weather the economic storms of the past two years.

- We recognized early -- in June of 2008 -- that we needed to address larger, more difficult, and structural financial issues; nipping around the edges was not going to work.
- We decided to be both transparent and as inclusive as possible for that was what we believed we would need if, in the long-term, we were to succeed. This approach is unusual, difficult, and time consuming on a college campus: so many questions come with even the smallest amount of information conveyed if it has never before been discussed openly. Fully expected, but it required a huge amount of patience and time.
- We established two goals: preserve the educational experience for our students and, because of the nature of our community, avoid layoffs.
- Over the course of almost two years we made a number of changes that leave us, assuming all of our assumptions regarding revenues and expenditures hold-and many are very conservative-with balanced budgets for the next five years.
- We did this through a combination of budget cuts and increased revenue.
- We offered early retirement and voluntary separation programs, which reduced our non-faculty staff by nearly 15 percent.
- We instituted a salary freeze for two years for those earning more than \$50,000/year. Members of my staff took 5 and 10 percent salary cuts.
- We increased enrollment by 50 students.
- The result, as I mentioned, is that we have been able to balance our budget, and do it without layoffs or severe program cuts.
- But to sustain the gains we made over the past two years, and decrease the chances of having to do this again 3, 5, or 10 years down the road, we also changed our long-term financial model and how we plan.
- We recognized that colleges must now operate in an economy that was likely to be very different from that of the past three decades.
- We needed to plan with the understanding that our three main revenue sources: the comprehensive fee; endowment income; and fund raising could not keep increasing at rates we had counted on in the past.
- As a result, we established a more constrained and conservative long-term financial model, by reducing our expectations for investment returns, the year-to-year growth in gifts, and by limiting tuition increases each year to 100 basis points, or 1 percentage point, above the CPI.

As we look out beyond a one-year horizon, we are now planning with fewer resources assumed to be available, which, because our aspirations have not diminished, will force us to be more focused on our priorities, more deliberate in deciding what we should do, and be willing to stop doing things that do not contribute to our students' experience as profoundly as might have once been the case.

And we are leveraging our longtime leadership in language teaching to create what, in the long term, we anticipate will be a fourth revenue stream for the College. As many of you have probably read, earlier this year the College entered a partnership with K12 Inc., the largest provider of online educational curricula for pre-college students, to create a new for-profit company, called *Middlebury Interactive Languages*, to develop innovative online language courses for high school students.

The first courses, beginner French and Spanish, will be available this fall. Middlebury Interactive Languages will also expand the Middlebury-Monterey Language Academy, our three-year old bricks and mortar summer language immersion program for middle and high school students.

This initiative into a new medium of language teaching, in addition to potentially earning important revenue for the College, will allow us to maintain our leadership position in the teaching of languages. Given how on-line education has grown and will grow even more in the coming years, we cannot sit on the sidelines, limit our teaching of languages and cultures to 2400 undergraduates in a brick and mortar environment, and hope to retain our long-developed and hard-earned leadership position in this area. We must take what we do so well in the traditional classroom setting and offer the analog for the newer, on-line medium. Though there is a risk in pursuing this venture, I believe there is a greater risk in not doing it.

On a larger scale, this initiative also answers a critical national need by expanding access to language education at a time when opportunities for pre-college students to learn languages are declining and language and cultural literacy have become more and more important to our nation's global competitiveness.

While this exciting venture is rather unique for a liberal arts college, it is, in my view, just an extension of this College's history of innovation, of taking risks for the betterment of the institution, and to increasing the chances of preserving what we do so well right here, which is to educate bright young adults in a human-intensive way so they can be best prepared to succeed in a world that is increasingly interconnected, globalized, and competitive.

Of course, we need look no further than to all of you-the alumni assembled in the Chapel today-for proof of the impact and importance of a liberal arts education.

Through your own lives and accomplishments you bring renown to the college. Many of you are at the center of national and world events. The alumni achievement award winners in this year's reunion classes-Jane Bryant Quinn, Class of 1960, and Randy Brock, Class of 1965-are great examples of our alumni's impact in the world.

All of you provide essential assistance to your *alma mater*, and I dutifully and respectfully request that you continue to do for the College all you have been doing:

- Recommend Middlebury to excellent prospective students.
- Serve as alumni interviewers.
- Provide internships and career advice.
- Hire Middlebury graduates. And
- Provide financial support, however much you can. We are proud to say that 62 percent of alumni made a gift to the College last year, which made Middlebury the number one school in the country for alumni participation.

This college's future is blazingly bright. I am most honored and thankful to have the opportunity to serve as its 16th president, and I thank you for all the support you provide to the College and to our students. We would not be able to do what we do, and how we do it, without your help and support.

I wish you all a wonderful Reunion. I remind you that our campus-your campus-is always open to you, and we look forward to welcoming you back many, many times.

Thank you.

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